

**Remarks Prepared for Delivery  
Marion C. Blakey  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Black History Month  
FAA Headquarters Auditorium  
Washington, DC  
February 4, 2003**

---

Good morning. I am pleased to be here today to help kick off Black History Month.

You know, as I looked over this month's planned events, I couldn't help but wish my schedule would allow more time to participate. I was thinking particularly of the lecture on the "History of Gospel Music" this Thursday at Fort McNair. Now I grew up in the South, and I know Gospel music is just as much a part of the Southern experience as grits and sweet tea.

In fact, this past January 20<sup>th</sup>, I was in Montgomery, Alabama on Martin Luther King's birthday -- at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. I'll bet some of you have been there. Talk about Gospel music. I tell you -- it was really moving, as was the service for Dr. King's birthday and the new governor's inauguration.

And, what a focus you have chosen for this year's Black History Month -- the centennial anniversary of W.E.B. DuBois's famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Like all classics, this book transcends its time and speaks to all of us today just as forcefully as it did when it was first published a hundred years ago.

I think it's appropriate that just as we at the FAA celebrate the centennial of powered flight you have chosen to look back at an important centennial milestone in African American history.

Before I go any further, though, I want to mention a connection between Orville and Wilbur Wright and the African-American community that may not be widely known -- namely, that the Wright Brothers were close friends of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the famous African American poet.

Orville Wright, in fact, was a classmate of Paul Dunbar at Central High School in Dayton, Ohio. Dunbar was the only African American in the class. Dunbar, who was a good student, graduated. Orville did not and dropped out after three years to pursue his interest in the printing business. And, in one of those interesting historical twists, the

printing business is eventually what cemented the life-long friendship between Paul Dunbar and the Wright Brothers.

Dunbar's dream was to publish a newspaper for Dayton's African-American community, but he couldn't get anyone to print it. So, Orville and Wilbur stepped in and printed it for him. Only three issues of "The Tattler" were ever printed because Dunbar ran out of money. He was on his way to becoming famous for his writings and actually achieved considerable attention before the Wright Brothers achieved fame for the first powered flight at Kitty Hawk.

One of Paul Dunbar's famous poems - - one that you may well hear recited this month - - is entitled "The Seedling." The poem emphasizes encouragement, strength, and determination that all people must find in order to pursue their dreams. Much of which, of course, comes from within.

And, that brings me back full circle to the theme of this year's Black History Month program and a central theme of Dr. DuBois's "The Souls of Black Folk."

DuBois was one of the architects and voices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights movement. At a time when it was probably not politically correct to say so publicly, he boldly stated that one of the major problems facing 20<sup>th</sup> century America was the color line. But, foreshadowing Dr. King's "I Have A Dream" speech some 60 years later, DuBois too had a dream that - - and I quote - - "some day, on American soil, two world races give each to each those characteristics which both so sadly lack."

What an important statement about diversity.

Dr. DuBois also said, each African American youth must achieve "self-realization, self-respect ... To attain his [or her] place in the world, he [she] must be himself and not another."

Since Dr. DuBois first made that statement - - and Dr. King later echoed those sentiments - - we have come a long way as a country. But, as President Bush has noted, we have not yet erased the color barrier or the opportunity barrier. And, certainly our work is not complete at the FAA. As a matter of fact, one of my top priorities for this agency is greater equity. Greater equity between lines of business and professions and greater equity of opportunity for everyone in the agency. Although we are in tough budgetary times, we must pay attention to fairness and equity, even when we are constrained in our ability to hire.

I think the Affirmative Employment Oversight Board is an important tool in this regard. And, the National Black Coalition of Federal Aviation Administration Employees was a major proponent of that Board. One of the things I want the Board to do is to help

create a greater awareness in the agency of the agency's demographics . . . particularly among executives and top managers.

I was pleased to see that *Minority Engineer Magazine* ranked the FAA number five among the best twenty government agencies to work for. That issue featured a cover photo of Gregory Davidson, an African-American FAA aerospace engineer from the Central Region.

This is an encouraging sign that we are making progress. We will continue to work hard on recruitment and hiring of African Americans and other ethnic groups. It is important to keep in mind, as Dr. DuBois and Paul Dunbar remind us, that individual effort also is required and that the greatest driving force for the strength and determination to succeed lies in our own hands.

Thank you.